

GOLD

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE
SOCIETY OF ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIANS
AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND
VOL. 33**

Edited by AnnMarie Brennan and Philip Goad

Published in Melbourne, Australia, by SAHANZ, 2016

ISBN: 978-0-7340-5265-0

The bibliographic citation for this paper is:

AnnMarie Brennan "*Perspecta 9/10* and the Emergence of a Postmodern American Architecture." In *Proceedings of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand: 33, Gold*, edited by AnnMarie Brennan and Philip Goad, 76-82. Melbourne: SAHANZ, 2016.

All efforts have been undertaken to ensure that authors have secured appropriate permissions to reproduce the images illustrating individual contributions. Interested parties may contact the editors.

PERSPECTA 9/10 AND THE EMERGENCE OF A POSTMODERN AMERICAN ARCHITECTURE

The editorial approach of a student journal may appear to be a somewhat insignificant contribution to architectural discourse, however to understand the significance of a single issue, one must consider the environment that helped to form it, and the characters who played an important part in the creation of the issue. Founded at the Yale School of Architecture in 1952, Perspecta is the oldest and longest running student-edited architectural journal in the United States. Historically, what set this journal apart from other architectural periodicals was that it was one of the first to approach the topic of design from artistic, historical and theoretical vantage points. And in many respects, the 1965 issue Perspecta 9/10 edited by a young Robert A.M. Stern, could be cited as one of the primary venues in which architectural history/theory and architectural practice coalesced to establish a postmodern American architecture.

Stern, now retired Dean of the Yale School of Architecture, claimed that his editorial objective was to present new emerging 'talent,' which consisted of young architects who would come to define a new American movement in architecture. Three significant contributors to this particular issue of Perspecta were Robert Venturi, Charles Moore, and Romaldo Giurgola.

Looking back at this moment, it is intriguing to discover what defined the work featured in these magazines as 'American.' Beginning with an overview of Perspecta 9/10, this paper will examine how the medium of the student-edited architectural magazine assisted in promoting the idea of an American architecture during the mid-1960s. In doing so, this paper will demonstrate how the architectural journal, written by mostly architects and edited by an architecture graduate student, would become a vehicle in establishing an American postmodern architectural theory.

Introduction

The journal has been compared to the Yale Law Review as both journals are produced by the graduate students of the School who solicit and edit articles from distinguished scholars and professional practitioners. Stern claimed the Yale student-edited journal *Perspecta* “marked the beginning of a new kind of critical discourse about architecture. Although *Perspecta* was never a mass-market publication, its impact on the field has belied its numbers. The journal was – and continues to be – an intellectual showpiece for the Yale School of Architecture and an important presence in the design community.”¹ The architectural historian Henry-Russell Hitchcock, a contributor to *Perspecta* 6 stated in 1960: “*Perspecta* has never offered the last word on any subject, but quite often it has uttered what (in the context, at least) was the first word. This is a service which the professional journals, burdened with other intellectual responsibilities, have in our country been reluctant to perform, and one which the scholarly journals, by their very nature, are vowed not to attempt.”²

Initially, with the first eight issues of *Perspecta*, the editors went around the school and recorded, then transcribed, what were called ‘studio talks;’ small informal chats amongst studio instructors such as Philip Johnson, Louis Kahn, and Gordon Bunschaft and a circle of students on the current state of architecture. This exercise not only indicated the type of architectural pedagogy taught in the studios at the time, but it also demonstrates a direct correlation between the contents of the journal and the discussion and activities going on within the Yale School of Architecture.

In a publication celebrating the 50th anniversary of the *Perspecta*, Stern claimed that the idea of the journal came to the architect George Howe, after he was appointed Chairman of the Yale Department of Architecture in January 1950. Paraphrasing Howe’s introduction to *Perspecta* 1, he noted, “Yale’s students, though professionally inexperienced, were nonetheless clear-sighted observers of the contemporary architectural scene. He believed that students, and not the establishment, were able to seize upon new ideas and to interpret the work of the past and present as a single continuity.”³

However, Norman Carver, one of the editors for the inaugural issue of *Perspecta* 1, along with Joan Wilson and Charles Brickbauer, refuted the notion that the journal was the idea of Howe. “The first reason [for the journal,]” writes Norman Carver, “was our boredom with the commercial architectural magazines of the time – their lack of stimulating projects and their total absence of intellectual content. “The second reason,” Carver continues, “follows from the first in that we were enjoying, and [...] taping, the stimulating lectures, discussions with visiting critics, and informal studio debates with prominent figures such as Lou Kahn, Phillip Johnson, and Bucky Fuller. While most of this interesting material was ephemeral, some of us found it to be a most significant part of our architectural education and we felt it should be preserved and disseminated in a more useful form.”⁴

The journal performed as an academic platform to shed a critical light onto issues considered relevant to architecture within a new, post-war global context. Eventually student editors selected topics and themes they deemed important and had a global outlook. Contributors over the years included art historian Vincent Scully, Colin Rowe, Kenneth Frampton, photographer Ezra Stoller, artists Ben Shahn, Isamu Noguchi, Richard Serra, philosophers Roland Barthes and Karsten Harris, composer John Cage, in addition to noted architects Tadao Ando, Peter Eisenman, Paul Rudolph, Eero Saarinen, Colin St. John Wilson, among numerous others. Louis Kahn was a favoured author and subject, with a total of 5 articles in the early issues. Philip Johnson was also a regular contributor.

Significance of *Perspecta 9/10*

Perspecta 9/10 stands out as a significant issue as it was the journal's first double-issue edited by a young Robert A.M. Stern. It assembled a line-up of authors who would go on to shape the architectural scene for the next twenty years, leading to what has become known as the White/Grey Debate and, most importantly, establish what Kate Nesbitt has termed "postmodern historicism."⁵ This paper attempts to explore *Perspecta 9/10* and its background in an attempt to demonstrate that through the selective curatorial acts of an "editor/architect" this student journal served as the discursive origin of postmodern architecture and, most significantly, postmodern architectural theory. This claim is in contradistinction to most recent scholarship which usually claims *Oppositions* as the first architectural journal to foster architectural theory.⁶

The significance of this issue sets the foundation for many of Stern's polemical texts that would later follow in his career as spokesperson for "the Greys," or rather an American postmodern historical architecture. Such publications include the exhibition and catalogue for *40 Under 40: An Exhibition of Young Talent in Architecture* (1966), *New Directions in American Architecture* (1969), "Gray Architecture as Post-Modernism, or Up and Down from Orthodoxy" (1976), and "New Directions in Modern American Architecture: Postscript at the Edge of Modernism" (1977).⁷ All of these publications serve as a sort of retroactive editorial for *Perspecta 9/10* by reiterating the major themes of its authors and re-publishing their work.

During the mid-1960s and early 1970s, there was a series of similar publications which chose to focus on the historical development of American architecture, such as Scully's *American Architecture and Urbanism* (1969), Edgar Kaufmann Jr.'s *The Rise of an American Architecture 1815 – 1915* (1970), as well as the themed journal issues of *Casabella Continuita* published in 1963 and *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* in 1965 dedicated to contemporary American architecture.

Unlike previous issues of the journal, which published interviews and articles from established architects who were teaching at the school, Stern's editorial line looked to publish articles from Yale architectural historians such as Vincent Scully and George Hershey, yet it also searched to discover young architects who would come to define a new movement. The issue did not include an editorial statement or introduction, however the suggestion of a new movement in American architecture can be deciphered from the curated table of contents, which lists the names and a brief biography of each contributing author/architect.

Soliciting Authors

Among these young authors were Robert Venturi, Charles Moore, and Romaldo Giurgola; three architects who were concurrently short-listed for the position of Dean at the Yale School of Architecture, filling the position vacated by Paul Rudolph. According to Stern, "these architects were largely unknown [architects] except for *Perspecta 9/10*."⁸ The manner in which Stern discovered these new young architects was by way of a series of introductions and chance encounters by friends, teachers, and other architects.

Denise Scott Brown, in the article "Team 10, *Perspecta 10* and the Present State of Architectural Theory," described the contents of *Perspecta 9/10* and advocated for this new American group of architects celebrated within its pages. She posited that the Yale School of Architecture published a journal which "catches the spirit of a moment in what may or may not be a new point of departure for American architecture."⁹ While not an official group, these architects were a "series of individual heads of small firms and part-time teachers whose work has something in common." She then continued to describe the architects which best defined this shift in American architectural values, which included Venturi, Moore, Giurgola, and Kahn.

Robert Venturi

Stern was introduced to the work of Robert Venturi by the architectural historian Helen Searing, who was a PhD candidate in the Yale Art history program at the time. She suggested Venturi's work may be of interest as a possible contributor to the issue. Venturi was starting to build an underground reputation by students as an interesting instructor at the University of Pennsylvania who introduced theory and history into the teaching of contemporary architectural

subjects; a novel approach to architectural pedagogy for American students.

Around 1962, Stern went to Philadelphia to give a talk (mind you he is still a student at this point) and sought out Venturi, who then showed Stern a little house he was building for his mother in Chestnut Hill. Venturi mentioned to Stern a book that he had been writing and Stern asked if he could see it. He was able to scoop a chapter from what is now widely known as *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, a book that would be published in full in 1966 by the Museum of Modern Art a year after the publication of *Perspecta 9/10*.

Romaldo Giurgola

Stern met Aldo Giurgola in New Haven at the invitation of Paul Rudolph. Rudolph knew Giurgola from Cornell University, where they both taught together before Rudolph went to Yale and Giurgola to Columbia University. Then, on a separate occasion, while Stern was editing *Perspecta*, he and Aldo were re-introduced. Soon after that meeting, *Progressive Architecture* published an article on what came to be known as the Philadelphia school – a group consisting of Kahn, Venturi, Giurgola, among others.¹⁰ Stern was interested in the work of Venturi, and Giurgola and Venturi had a “back-to-back” office arrangement in Philadelphia. This arrangement included the shifting of people from one office to the other in order to impress potential clients visiting the office by providing the illusion that they were well-staffed.

Their offices, located on 17th Street in Philadelphia, were not far from Kahn’s office at 15th and Walnut. Stern considered an article by Giurgola after he was given a tour of some projects, such as Giurgola’s Mrs. White House in Chestnut Hill, P.A. (1963), which was near Kahn’s Esric House in Philadelphia (1961), and Venturi’s house for his mother, also in Philadelphia (1964).

While Stern assembled the final parts to his issue, a Yale University Dean Search committee lead, by University President Kingman Brewster, was assigned the task of hiring someone for the position of Dean at the Yale School of Architecture. With the strong promotion of Vincent Scully, Venturi was the committee’s first choice. However Venturi and Brewster could not come to an agreement, since Venturi insisted that as Dean he should be guaranteed a commission to design a building on the Yale campus and the President could not agree to this. (Venturi would later go on to design a building, the Anlyan Center, School of Medicine Building at Yale in 2003). The second choice of the committee was Giurgola, who was also being considered at that time for the architecture chairmanship position at Columbia.

In order to find out more about Giurgola, Kingman Brewster sent an aide to find Stern. He said something along the lines of “I understand you are editing a magazine and there is someone in your journal named Garagola?” and Stern responded that you must mean “Giurgola?” (Mind you Italian, “ethnic” names were not really prevalent within the all-male, mostly white, Protestant student body). “Well the president would like to know more about him.”¹¹ Stern and the aide went to the Yale printing offices where the actual printing of the pages of the journal was taking place, and reached into the printing press and selected the pages of Giurgola’s *Perspecta* article, putting them aside to dry for the President. Giurgola was interviewed by Brewster and the committee, and offered the position to him, however his wife Adalida, who was connected to the New York art scene, claimed that if she had to move from Philadelphia, she would much prefer to go to New York than to New Haven. Giurgola declined Yale’s invitation, and was then appointed chair at Columbia, and the third person on the Yale short-list, Charles Moore, was asked to be Dean and would ultimately preside in that position until 1970.

According to Stern, he was prompted to invite Giurgola to submit an article to *Perspecta* because the goal of the issue was to present a new group of people with a shared approach; elevating the field of architecture to another stage following the denouement of modernism, which, especially in the U.S, had become a tired architectural vocabulary. Giurgola was part of this group, and his characteristic, subtle approach to post-war design was admired in projects such as his Parking Garage project at the University of Pennsylvania (1963), which had shown a kind of re-interpretation of Corbusian Modernism, but one which was much more situated within the context of the city. There was also the simple fact that Giurgola’s office had a lot of work and they were completing many significant projects. In Stern’s view, Venturi, Moore, and Giurgola had a broader, deeper view of architectural history that was applied to the design process.

The use of architectural history within the architectural pedagogy during this post-war moment was treated in a very different way than contemporary methods of teaching. For example, schools such as the GSD at Harvard under Gropius did not have architectural history as part of the curriculum. Venturi, as a recipient of the Rome prize, attending the American Academy for two years, from 1954 – 56, had a sophisticated appreciation for the history of Italian architecture. At that time he studied the architectural masterpieces of Michelangelo and Borromini. Charles Moore was very well-travelled, and he visited Italy to conduct research for his PhD at Princeton on “Water and Architecture.” For these figures, Italy became an eye-opening experience providing insight into how history brings *meaning* to architecture. Whereas Giurgola, as an Italian, already valued architectural history within this historically-rich environment of Italy, and therefore an appreciation for history and tradition in architecture was part of an innate sensibility; a prerequisite to making what he would later describe in another student journal *Precis* as an ethical approach to architecture.¹²

Charles Moore

In *Perspecta 9/10*, Moore contributed the canonical essay “You Have To Pay for the Public Life,” which surprisingly (and ironically) cited Disneyland in California as a successful model of urbanism as it “recreates all the chances to respond to a public environment, which Los Angeles particularly does not any longer have.”¹³ He claimed,

Disney has created a place, indeed a whole public world, full of sequential occurrences, of big and little drama, of hierarchies of importance and excitement, with opportunities to respond at the speed of rocketing bobsleds or of horse-drawn street cars. An American Main Street of about 1910 is the principal theme, against which play fairy-tale fantasies, frontier adventure situations, jungles, and the world of tomorrow.¹⁴

Most tellingly, Stern recalled that he discovered the work of Charles Moore through an article by Donlyn Lyndon published in the American themed issue of *Casabella Continuita*, and it is here, within the pages of this 1963 *Casabella* issue, where we can see what was perhaps the fount of inspiration for Stern’s issue, and connect the thematic and theoretical threads with *Perspecta 9/10*. In 1965, Lyndon would become a partner with Moore in the architectural firm Moore Lyndon Turnbull Whitaker. Before doing so, he wrote an article for *Casabella* titled, “Philology of American Architecture,” which called for a new type of architecture that would rebel against the accepted norms of previous generations, specifically a watered-down and demoralized modernism that used a “facile, glib vocabulary,” and functioned as a type of “slang;” communicating with other architects, but failing to “explore significant patterns of living.” Lyndon proclaimed, “The International Architectural Press keeps professionals more in touch with each other than with their society and its problems, and there is a consequent tendency to develop in-group languages of form that are significant only to the like-minded.”¹⁵

In a reproach to the inherited, prevailing architecture of post-war modern architecture, Lyndon suggested this new generation of young architecture featured in his article shared a growing dissatisfaction with the majority of contemporary architecture, which had, “too easily to have formalized its approach, applying thoughtless canons.”¹⁶ The architects selected and described in his article were “heretical,” in that their work was viewed as a protest against both the concepts and forms of the previous generation, leading to “ineffectual ends.”¹⁷

Two Americas in One

Lyndon’s overview of the state of architecture in the U.S. at that time presented many of the same architects and projects that Stern would feature in his *Perspecta* issue. Similar architects described in both Lyndon’s article and Stern’s *Perspecta* included Kahn, Venturi, Johnson, Mitchell Giurgola, Kallman, Mc Kinnell, and Knowles (both on the Boston City Hall project), and Moore. Moreover the *Casabella* issue contained an enlightening editorial by Ernesto N. Rogers, which may have planted the seed, and foreshadowed the White/Grey debates that followed in the 1970s. Titled, “Two Americas in One,” Rogers stated the following, “Americans no longer think only about their present and their future; they have been trying to grasp a tradition on which to construct, through its multiple words, a unified language, a language capable of expressing an autonomous reality owing nothing to others.”¹⁸ Yet despite this search for a unified language, Rogers noted that two different Americas succeeded in coexisting, and in fact the country was rich in “dialectical clashes.” Despite this success, American architects were unable to discover a “figurative” environment, or language to express its diversity. He wrote:

This society is attracted by two opposite poles: on the one hand there are the problems of a metropolis sprung of the industrial development of the country, both those met in dealing with the big themes of its practical needs and those arising from the technical instruments of the same organisms; on the other hand, opposition to the metropolis calls for small, modest architecture built in wood and other simple materials.¹⁹

Many years later, in the article “New Directions in Modern American Architecture: Postscript at the Edge of Modernism,” Stern continued Lyndon’s “philology” of architecture by calling for a communicative architectural language that was embedded with cultural meaning.²⁰ Similar to his previous writings, Stern cited Venturi and Moore as the originators of postmodern historicism, signalling a change from an autonomous modern formalism to a new mode of architectural design which premised meaning before formal concerns. This was accomplished through the façade, as viewed in the work of Venturi, and in the spirit of Giurgola’s work, the city context, followed by the idea of cultural memory. These three issues were synthesized by Stern as contextualism, allusionism, and ornamentalism.

Conclusion

Stern was drawn to architects Venturi, Giurgola, and Moore as they were designers which understood the value of architectural history in design practice. He stated,

These were cultivated people who could speak about architecture, not just in terms of nuts and bolts or the current work of the day, [or simply in] reference to Mies or Le Corbusier or Wright, but in reference to Michelangelo, urbanism, and context. This was in contradistinction between the self-referential architecture of those days.²¹

And not unlike Soane, or Alberti, or Palladio, these architects were beginning, again, to write about their own work in a self-reflective, systematic way.

If theory can be understood as a self-reflection of a design process on the part of the architect, combined with the ability to provide a textual and visual explanation, a spectacle in which one can observe and understand the world around us, then this issue of *Perspecta 9/10* and the articles by these three architects accomplish that. With the architect as a collator of information and editor, we witness the origins of an American architectural theory in the U.S. via Italy through the medium of an Italian architecture magazine.

Endnotes

- 1 Much of the information gathered for this paper was from an interview with Robert A.M. Stern in his Manhattan office in June 2011. Also see recent publication, Robert A.M. Stern and Jimmy Stamp, *Pedagogy and Place: 100 Years of Architecture Education at Yale* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 239.
- 2 Henry-Russell Hitchcock, “Food for Changing Sensibility,” *Perspecta* 6, 1960.
- 3 Robert A.M. Stern, Peggy Deamer, and Alan Plattus, eds. *Rereading Perspecta: the First Fifty Years of the Yale Architectural Journal* (Cambridge, M.A.: MIT Press, 2005), xvi.
- 4 Norman Carver, email correspondence with author, February 11, 2000.
- 5 Kate Nesbitt, ed., *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture. An Anthology of Architectural Theory 1965 – 1995*, (Cambridge, M.A.: MIT Press), 26.

- 6 An exemption to this is Mitchell Schwartz, "History and Theory in Architectural Periodicals: Assembling Oppositions," *JSAH* 58, (1999): 344. Nadia Watson, "The White vs the Grays: re-examining the 1970s avant-garde," *Fabrications*, vol. 15, no. 1, July 2005; Joan Ockman, "Resurrecting the Avant-Garde: the History and Program of *Oppositions*," Joan Ockman and Beatriz Colomina, eds., *Architectureproduction*, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1988) 181-199; Harry Francis Malgrave and David J. Goodman, *Introduction to Architectural Theory: 1968 to the Present* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 36.
- 7 Robert A.M. Stern and the Architectural League of New York, *40 Under 40: An Exhibition of Young Talent in Architecture* (New York: Architectural League of New York, 1966); Robert A.M. Stern, *New Directions in American Architecture*, (New York: George Braziller, 1969); Robert A.M. Stern, "Gray Architecture as Post-Modernism, or Up and Down from Orthodoxy," *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui*, 186 (August-September 1976); Robert A.M. Stern, "New Directions in Modern American Architecture: Postscript at the Edge of Modernism," *AAQ*, 9, (2-3) (1977), 66-71.
- 8 Stern and Stamp, *Pedagogy and Place*, 239.
- 9 Denise Scott Brown, "Team 10, *Perspecta* 10 and the Present State of Architectural Theory," *AIP-Journal*, vol. 33, no. 1 (Jan. 1967), 42-50.
- 10 Jan C. Rowen, "Wanting to Be: The Philadelphia School," *Progressive Architecture*, April 1961: 4002-4012. Also see Mimi Lobell, "Postscript: Kahn, Penn, and the Philadelphia School," *Oppositions* 4, 1974.
- 11 Robert A.M. Stern, interviewed by author, June 2011.
- 12 Romaldo Giurgola, "Notes of Architecture and Morality," *Precis* II, Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, (1980): 51-52.
- 13 Charles Moore, "You Have To Pay for the Public Life," *Perspecta* 9/10, 1965, 65. Robert A.M. Stern would go on to design buildings for the Walt Disney Company, such as Disney's Yacht Club, Disney's Beach Club Resort, and the plan for Celebration, Florida. He would also serve on its board of directors from 1992 – 2003.
- 14 Charles Moore, "You Have To Pay for the Public Life," 65.
- 15 Donlyn Lyndon, "Philology of American Architecture," *Casabella Continuita'*, no. 281, 1963: 8.
- 16 Lyndon, "Philology of American Architecture," 8.
- 17 Lyndon, "Philology of American Architecture," 8.
- 18 Ernesto N. Rogers, "Two Americas in One," *Casabella Continuita'*, no. 281, 1963: 1.
- 19 Rogers, "Two Americas in One," *Casabella Continuita'*, 1.
- 20 Robert A.M. Stern, "New Directions in Modern American Architecture: Postscript at the Edge of Modernism," *AAQ*, 9, (2-3) (1977), 66-71.
- 21 Robert A.M. Stern, interviewed by author, June 2011.

